



# Wyoming Game and Fish Department

## Pinedale Region

### November 2016 Newsletter



Pinedale Fish Biologist Darren Rhea holds up a large burbot netted in Fontenelle Reservoir in October.

## Tracking Burbot in the Green

Members of the Pinedale Fish crew have been busy netting and marking burbot as part of a research project to determine their population dynamics and movements within the Green River drainage.

Burbot, not native to the Green River drainage, were likely illegally introduced, likely forever altering this renowned river system. Burbot are a voracious predator feeding almost exclusively on other fish or crayfish. Flaming Gorge, Fontenelle, and Big Sandy reservoirs have seen dramatic declines in some fish populations, especially smallmouth bass. Native populations of some imperiled fish species, such as bluehead and flannelmouth suckers, also have seen drastic changes as burbot have become es-



Pinedale Fish Crew members, Colter Brown, Darren Rhea and Cynthia Nau remove fish netted in Fontenelle Reservoir.

established. Burbot have been documented in the Green River just below the town of Daniel.

Fish movements primarily will be tracked through the use of PIT (Passive Integrated Transponder) tags that have been placed in over 500 burbot, so far. A PIT antennae has been installed upstream from Fontenelle Reservoir to monitor the timing and how many burbot move up the Green River. Managers are hoping to identify congregations, such as

(Left above) A tiny PIT tag is inserted into the belly of a burbot. (Left) A PIT antennae installed on the Green River to record when tagged fish move upstream. (Right) a tagged burbot is released back into Fontenelle Reservoir.





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### Trophy Deer Poacher Convicted

A high-profile poaching case involving a large mule deer buck that had been illegally shot in the early winter of 2015 has been settled by the Sublette County Circuit Court with a guilty plea agreement prior to a scheduled jury trial.

On March 29, 2016, Nate Strong of Big Piney, Wyoming, was charged with intentionally taking an antlered mule deer out of season. Strong was formally sentenced on October 25, 2016, in the Sublette County Circuit Court. Strong was ordered to pay over \$9,000 in fines and restitution, and will serve 10 days in jail or five days in jail and 50 hours community service. His hunting and fishing privileges were also suspended for seven years.

The case began on February 13, 2016, when Big Piney Game Warden Adam Hymas was contacted by concerned sportsmen who had observed the mounted deer on display at the Western Hunting and Conservation Expo in Salt Lake City, Utah. When they saw the deer on display, they immediately recognized it as one they had observed and photographed multiple times throughout the summer and fall of 2015 northwest of Pinedale. Several photographs of the large, non-typical buck had been taken after the hunting season had closed on October 7. As members of the public discussed this matter online the case received significant public attention on social and traditional media.

During the investigation, Warden Hymas and members of the Wyoming Game and Fish Department's Investigative Unit learned that Strong had harvested the deer on November 14, 2015, west of Big Piney, about five weeks after the mule deer season had closed in that area. Strong, who had already harvested a mule deer in September, used a license valid for white-tailed deer to tag the mule deer, stating he thought the deer was a hybrid between a mule deer and a white-tailed deer.

John Lund, Pinedale Regional Wildlife Supervisor for the Wyoming Game and Fish Department, said, "The concern and assistance from the public is certainly appreciated and this case is a good example of the public and Game and Fish personnel working together to protect Wyoming's wildlife. We often rely on tips and information from the public regarding wildlife violations."

Anyone with information on a possible poaching incident should call the STOP POACHING hotline at 1-877-WGFD-TIP (1-877-943-3847), any Game and Fish regional office, or any Game and Fish warden. Information can also be reported by clicking on the "Stop Poaching" icon located on the Wyoming Game and Fish Department's web site homepage at <https://wgfd.wyo.gov/web2011/home.aspx>. Any information leading to an arrest and conviction may result in a cash reward and anyone providing information may remain anonymous.



*The trophy deer mount displayed at a sportsmen show in Salt Lake City in early 2016. (Below) a photo of the live deer taken in the fall of 2015.*





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### Hunting: The Good & the Bad

**North Pinedale Game Warden Bubba Haley** reported early October snow and other environmental factors caused mule deer to begin migrating earlier than normal. As a result, thousands of deer were migrating through bottlenecks along the Wind River Front during the last week of the general deer season, creating ample opportunity for hunters and harvest was much higher than previous years.

Elk also moved down in elevation in October and were very accessible. Hunters reported seeing more elk than normal in the sage brush and aspen interfaces. Due to increased harvest and accessibility of deer and elk, violations increased in October. Several citations were issued for shooting from roads, over limit of moose, wrong sex moose, failure to tag and over limit of deer.



*The Sublette County School District deemed Monday October 17 "Hunting Day" and gave kids a free pass from attending school. Katelyn Heyward, 16, of Pinedale made good use of her day to harvest this 16 inch pronghorn buck.*

**South Pinedale Game Warden Jordan Kraft** received a tip about a yearling buck deer that had been shot and left in Farson and had a lead on a suspect vehicle. A quick investigation identified two California suspects who were hunting doe mule deer on several ranches in the Farson area. One suspect had already left the state after the poaching incident, but the other suspect was located and interviewed.



When confronted with the evidence, the man readily admitted to accidentally shooting a yearling buck mule deer on a doe/fawn license. The suspect stated they were both troubled by the situation and decided to hide and abandon the deer instead of caring for the meat or notifying a game warden.

It's likely the suspects fled from the area after the incident because the man had shot the deer from a country road and in a wrong hunt area. Each had already harvested a deer in the wrong area. Both men were intentionally hunting in a wrong area after they were unsuccessful with their first choice hunt area. Further investigation revealed one suspect had also harvested an antelope on his wife's license and the man eventually admitted that his wife never even came to the state and does not hunt.



One suspect was charged in Sweetwater County with two counts of taking a deer in the wrong area, failure to wear fluorescent orange clothing, shooting a deer from a public roadway, taking the wrong gender of deer and waste/abandonment of big game. The man was fined nearly \$600, ordered to pay \$4,000 restitution for the deer, lost his hunting privileges for three years and was sentenced to two years of suspended jail time while placed on probation. The same man was also charged for the illegal antelope out of Uinta County and was fined over \$1,200 and lost his hunting privileges for five years on those offenses. The other suspect was interviewed in California and charged with taking a deer in the wrong area and for aiding in the abandonment and waste of a deer. The man was fined nearly \$700. Two harvested deer and one harvested antelope were seized from the men and the meat was donated to families in need.



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## Deer Rescue

Pinedale Brucellosis Feedground Habitat personnel Brandon Scurlock and Jared Rogerson responded to a call of mule deer fawn that had fallen into a pond on the golf course in Pinedale. The young deer could not get out due to a steep concrete embankment and was feared to be hypothermic. Fortunately, they were able to pull the deer out of the icy water and wrap him in a coat, cranked the heat and Jared kept him warm while we drove out to the Mesa. The little guy took off towards a small group of does and fawns and hopefully made it.



## From the Front Desk...

Pinedale Game and Fish Office Managers report that one of the most common questions they've been getting lately is how to get a permission slip to hunt one of the regional Hunter Management Areas (HMA). If you have a late season tag and plan on hunting in one of the Hunter Management Areas, you will need to get a permission slip. Go onto the WY Game & Fish website, click on "Hunting in WY," "Hunt Access," "Access Yes," "Hunter Management Program". From there, find the HMA for your hunt area and open it up. You will be able to access maps of the area, the rules of the participating land-owners and apply for your permission slip. Print off your permission slip and vehicle pass. You must have the permission slip on your person and display the vehicle pass on your dashboard at all times when hunting in the HMA. The permission slips are usually limited and are allocated on a first come, first serve basis. If you have any questions feel free to call the Pinedale Game & Fish office at 800-452-9107 (in-state) or 307-367-4353.

**Big Piney Game Warden Adam Hymas** reports another busy month with investigations on numerous violations including hunting deer in a closed season, trespassing, tagging violations, over limit of elk, taking wrong sex, wanton destruction and waste and hunting without license. One individual mistakenly harvested a mule deer instead of an elk and immediately turned himself in. The deer was salvaged and donated locally.





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### Roadifer Retires after 27 Years

Floyd Roadifer, Pinedale Aquatic Habitat Biologist for the Wyoming Game and Fish Department, has decided to call it a career after 27 years with the agency.

Roadifer began his Game and Fish career as a Project Habitat Biologist in Pinedale in 1989. He then transferred to Green River in April 1991, implementing watershed improvement projects on Little Mountain south of Rock Springs. In January 1996, he returned to Pinedale to serve as the Pinedale Aquatic Habitat Biologist, covering all of southwest Wyoming, where he spent the last twenty years of his Game and Fish career. During that time he has been active with large-scale and long-term projects including the purchase of two significant Wyoming Range allotment retirements and an array of conservation easements across the Pinedale Region.

During his career, Floyd was a champion of fully functioning watersheds and riparian systems. He was instrumental in the restoration of riparian and stream channel habitats in Raymond Canyon Wilderness Study Area benefiting Bonneville cutthroat trout native to Raymond Creek. When not extolling the virtues of proper grazing management, Floyd was ever active assisting others in the Pinedale Region. In this regard, he took the lead in securing angler access with the Huston Public Access Area on the Green River west of Pinedale.



*Floyd on a hunting pack trip in the Wind River Range.*

Degree in Range Management from the University of Wyoming in Laramie.

Floyd enjoys spending his free time with his family and friends in the outdoors, hunting, fishing and working with horses. These days, he will likely be spending more time where he is said to be most comfortable, atop a horse in Wyoming's backcountry.



*Pinedale Aquatic Habitat Biologist Floyd Roadifer conducting tall forb monitoring transects in the Wyoming Range.*

Floyd is a native of Ekalaka, Montana, and graduated high school in Newell, South Dakota. He first earned an Associate's Degree in Range Management from Northwest Community College in Powell and then a Bachelor's



*Floyd evaluating the South Cottonwood riparian habitat.*



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### Habitat Page

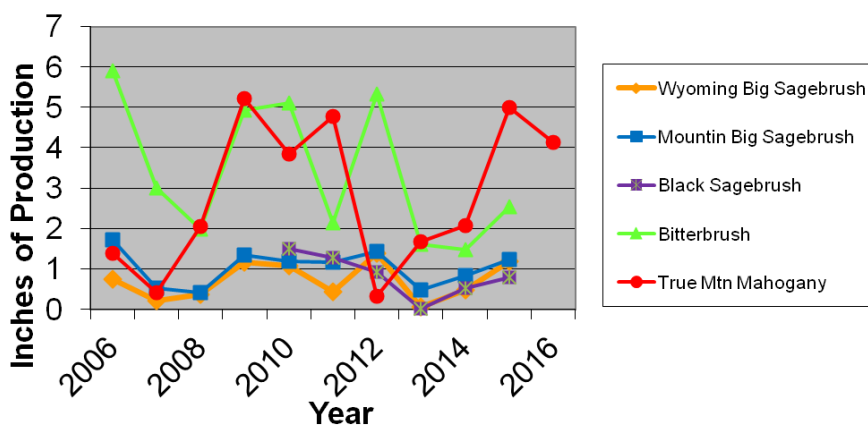
The growing conditions for shrubs on winter ranges in the Pinedale Region started out excellent. Precipitation was above average during the growing season (April through June) especially in May (4 inches) in parts of the region. In the months following, however, the amount of precipitation dropped off dramatically resulting in a hot and dry summer.

However, even with an increase in overall precipitation, True Mountain Mahogany production dropped slightly from last year (see graph below). This fact shows how the timing of precipitation is just as important as the amount received in terms of plant production. Seed production likely suffered from the lack of summer rains.



*Pinedale Habitat Biologist Jill Randall measures sagebrush leader growth on the Pinedale Mesa.*

#### Average Production of Browse Species



Big sagebrush requires at least three favorable years to successfully establish a new age class. We will continue to monitor to see if conditions in the previous three years will result in favorable recruitment in shrub communities.

Other shrub species were monitored where the Wyoming Game and Fish Department (WGFD) has implemented habitat treatments. In one such case (Three Buttes Dixie Harrow, 2014, below), production on Wyoming big sagebrush was almost four times greater in the treated area versus untreated areas. Many habitat treatments performed by the WGFD targeting shrub communities have the objective of establishing a younger age class of shrubs with additional benefits of increasing the productivity and vigor of plants that remain after treatment, such as the one mentioned above. With numerous obstacles that deer face on winter ranges, such as snow depth and extreme temperatures, habitat managers are working to increase over-winter survival through increased forage quality as a result of these habitat treatments.





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### New Luke Lynch Habitat Area

A new wildlife habitat management area that helps secure one of the country's most critical mule deer migration routes was recently acquired by the Wyoming Game and Fish Commission. The new Luke Lynch Wildlife Habitat Management Area (WHMA), located along the western front of the Wind River Range north of Pinedale, will be managed to conserve mule deer migration and preserve open space for big game winter range habitat. It is named to honor Luke Lynch who was The Conservation Fund's Wyoming state director. Lynch helped conserve this portion of the migration corridor, as well as many other critical properties in the state, before his untimely death in 2015.



"This land is a key piece in the longest mule deer migration route ever recorded in the lower 48 states. Thanks to our many partners who came together to maintain this important route, and I especially want to appreciate Luke for what he did for wildlife and for the partnerships he created that led to this moment," said Scott Talbott, Game and Fish director.

[The Conservation Fund](#) moved quickly to purchase the 364-acre Fremont Lake property on the open market in April 2015, protecting it from subdivision and development, which could have cut off the crucial migration pathway. Researchers at the University of Wyoming had identified the Fremont Lake Bottleneck property as the most threatened portion in this internationally-significant bi-annual Red Desert to Hoback Mule Deer Migration. Lead funding from the Knobloch Family Foundation along with significant contributions from the Wyoming Wildlife & Natural Resource Trust, Muley Fanatic Foundation, Community Foundation of Jackson Hole, George B. Storer Foundation, Packard Foundation and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and Crucial Corridors program enabled The Conservation Fund to acquire, enhance and donate the property to Game and Fish this fall.

"Luke had a passion for the conservation of working ranchlands and for maintaining the connectivity of large animal migration routes," said Mark W. Elsbree, senior vice president and western director for The Conservation Fund. "The new Luke Lynch WHMA is a tribute to his legacy and his hard work to maintain this incredible and enduring natural migration cycle, so it may live on for centuries to come."

The Luke Lynch WHMA is planned to open to the public May 1, 2017, and is currently closed until that date. The annual anticipated seasonal closure will be Dec.1-April 30, consistent with the nearby Soda Lake WHMA. This area will be open to hunting and other recreational pursuits. Between now and the opening date, Game and Fish will be working to prepare the area for public access.

"Game and Fish will be putting up public access signage, maintaining roads, and constructing parking areas and wildlife friendly fences," said Miles Anderson, Pinedale regional habitat and access supervisor. "We are working to keep the area as natural as possible for big game migration, so development will be limited to a minimum of access roads and parking areas."

Other planned projects include cheatgrass spraying and habitat restoration. These are in addition to the projects already completed by The Conservation Fund before the transfer, such as elk fence improvements, removal of older infrastructure, development of a Sagebrush Habitat Enhancement Plan, reclamation of disturbed areas, and other administrative work.